

April 4, 2007

To: Members of the HOAP (Help for Outcomes Assessment) group

cc: Lane Glenn

From: Ellen Wentland

Re: Fifth meeting of 2006/07 academic year – April 4, 2007

Attendees: Rose Dittmer, Joanna Fortna, Gerry Morin, Paulette Redmond, Suzanne VanWert, Ruth Young, Bill Zannini

We talked about the four programs doing outcomes assessments this academic year, and how in all four cases, coordinators worked with faculty to develop rubrics to assess the selected outcomes. This rubric development involved faculty discussions about criteria to be considered when judging certain assignments. Through this sharing of various perspectives, faculty have in many cases developed a more elaborate sense of relevant factors, and have also benefited from having a shared understanding of these factors. Students have benefited when faculty share criteria or rubrics so that expectations and standards are clearer. Taken together, just the development of rubrics is a “closing the loop” step, in that the rubric development and sharing leads to improvement in instructional and grading methods. Suzanne VanWert, whose Liberal Arts Program is involved in assessments this year, noted that she believed there was a benefit to faculty in debating the criteria for rubrics, and in disseminating the rubrics widely across the disciplines in her program. (Note: I neglected to share this but I have thought to develop a brief survey for students and faculty concerning their reactions to having a rubric. I plan to discuss this at the assessment implementation group tomorrow, and get their thoughts on this topic in general.)

We discussed the program review/ outcomes assessment process in general, and specifically concerning the amount of time faculty have to work on these projects. There was support for the idea of two course releases – one in the spring for outcomes assessment plan development and another in the fall for program review activity. I will discuss this with Lane.

Certain budgetary needs are or will be occasioned by assessment work. Examples are Suzanne’s need for raters of students’ essays as well as data entry staff. As more and more programs get involved, needs will undoubtedly increase. Now there is a budget, and we will have to plan for future needs in this year’s budget request.

We talked about college level competencies in the context of perhaps including associated objectives and outcomes on an outcomes assessment map template for degree programs. This topic led to a more general discussion about the competencies, including that there is some movement to revisit these. This will be one of the topics on the College Advisory Council’s April 23 agenda. Many members indicated their interest in attending.

At a previous meeting, I had indicated that I believe there is a need to post a reference note somewhere in students' materials (catalog, handbook, etc.) to alert them to the possibility that their work may be collected for purposes of program assessments. I prepared a note to share at today's meeting and with a couple of changes suggested by group members reads as follows:

*Northern Essex Community College's commitment to student success involves the evaluation of student work to help ensure that students are achieving the learning outcomes targeted by our programs. This process may involve the collection of student classroom products for evaluation at the program or department levels. When collected for this purpose, students' names will be removed from the products so that the assessing is done anonymously. Evaluations carried out at the program or department levels will not impact students' course grades. The process of assigning grades will continue to be the responsibility of the course instructor.*

I will share this suggested text with Lane.

Next topic involved the "publication" of learning outcomes on course syllabi. One of the NEASC standards calls for the institution to publish the "...learning goals ..." for each program. These learning goals are the learning outcomes being developed in the curriculum maps as part of the outcomes and assessments plan. Translating these outcomes to the course level would be one approach to publication. Group members thought that the language in the union contract was not a bar to this activity as instructional objectives are explicitly referenced in the contract and they are presented in the language of learning outcomes. One thought we had was to use the curriculum maps as a source of outcomes. On these maps, the relationship between courses and specific outcomes is displayed. Perhaps faculty teaching those courses could list as objectives (outcomes) those outcomes with which their course is associated on the map, as well as listing other outcomes they would like to include for their courses. Bill Zannini thought this was a good approach and indicated that, if the deans support this, he was willing to try it in his Business Program classes. I told him I would speak to Lane about this.

We didn't set a next meeting, but I believe I would like to have a last meeting of the year in early May.